

**ERECTION AND BLESSING OF THE OUTDOOR
STATIONS OF THE CROSS
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, LA CROSSE
DECEMBER 9, 2004**

Homily

With deepest gratitude to God, I come today, on the Feast of Saint Juan Diego, faithful messenger and herald of Our Lady of Guadalupe, to erect and bless the outdoor Stations of the Cross, an integral part of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Our Lady of Guadalupe came to our continent in 1531 to show us the all-merciful love of God for us, incarnate in her Divine Son. She remains with us in her miraculous image on the tilma of Juan Diego, drawing us to herself and leading us to her Son, our Savior. In her words to Saint Juan Diego, Our Lady repeatedly assured him of God's loving care for all His children, especially those in most need. She also repeatedly urged trust in God's merciful love, especially in times of trial and sorrow. When Juan Diego was overwhelmed with worry about his dying uncle and doubted very much that he could carry out what the Mother of God was asking of him, Our Lady spoke to him with these words:

Listen, place it in your heart, my littlest son, that what frightens you, afflicts you, disturbs your face, your heart, is nothing. Do not fear this illness, nor anything else which is painful or hurtful. Am I not here, I who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and watch? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the fold of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you have need of anything else? (Nican Mopohua, nn. 118-119).

To all of the pilgrims who come to the Shrine of Our Lady, she speaks the same words, especially to the pilgrims who come here with worries and troubles.

Our Blessed Mother shows her maternal care for us and leads us to the source of joy and peace in our lives by drawing us to the Way of the Cross. Making the Stations of the Cross, we come to understand more fully the profound meaning of our life pilgrimage, along which Christ accompanies us, urging us to take up our cross with him, in order that we may find joy and peace in this life, and reach our final destiny, our true and lasting home with God the Father.

The Stations of the Cross are a most treasured devotion in the Church, for they help us in a direct and practical way to meditate upon all that it meant for our Lord to suffer and die for us, to save us from our sins and to win for us the gift of everlasting life. When we cannot travel to the actual places in the Holy Land, in which our Lord accomplished our salvation, we make the Way of the Cross, mystically uniting ourselves to the Lord in the very places made holy by Him Who is all holy. Making the Stations of the Cross, how can we ever doubt God's love for us, His providence in our lives!

At the same time, making the Stations of the Cross, under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are filled with the love of Christ, the same love by which Christ bore such cruel sufferings for us and offered His life for our eternal salvation. Making the Way of the Cross, we are reminded that Christ depends upon us to be, with Saint Juan Diego, the heralds and instruments of His all-merciful kindness and love in the world. Our Blessed Mother explained to the doubting Juan Diego:

Listen, the smallest of my sons, hold it as certain that my servants, my messengers, to whom I entrust my wishes, my words, in order that they carry out my will, are not few; but it is necessary that you, personally, go and plead my cause, so that, through your pleading, my desire, my will, be carried out (Nican Mopohua, nn.58-59).

Making the Way of the Cross, we come to understand that God depends upon us personally to be His servants, His messengers, to return selfless love for His immeasurable love of us.

Before proceeding with the blessing, I express deepest gratitude to Sister Christa Marie Halligan and all of the staff of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who have prepared so well today's events. I thank, too, the Board of Directors of the Shrine; and Mr. Michael Swinghamer and Mr. Duncan Stroik, the architects, and Fowler and Hammer General Contractors.

We are deeply honored to have with us today Mr. Anthony Visco, the artist who created and executed the Stations of the Cross for the Shrine. Mr. Visco is an outstanding artist of deep Catholic faith. We are deeply grateful for his lasting contribution to the work of the Shrine.

As always, I express deepest gratitude to the Family of Robert and Lucille Swing, who have made the gift of this most beautiful site of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In going about the work of the Shrine, I am often thinking of the desire which Mr. Swing expressed before his death. He hoped that this most beautiful tract of land, which he had purchased and which had given him so much spiritual inspiration and consolation, could one day be a place for many to come for spiritual refreshment. His desire is always on my mind, in order that the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe steadfastly fulfill its noble purpose.

Today's sacred event marks yet one more significant step in the work of the building of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The progress of the Shrine depends upon the generosity of so many donors, their commitment to the work of Our Lady. I thank all of you who have been generous in your support of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The continued work of the Shrine also depends upon your generous support. Much remains to be done. Please pray and work that many will continue to make sacrifices for the Shrine, so that this work of devoted love of God may be brought to completion.

Finally, let us once again place the work of the Shrine into the hands of the Mother of God, who appeared on our continent under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Through her loving intercession and protection, the great work of devotion here will continue, to the glory of God and for the good of countless souls. We ask, too, the prayers of her devoted messenger, Saint Juan Diego, whose feast we celebrate today.

Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother of America and Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us.

Saint Juan Diego, pray for us.